



# Vasse Taskforce

December 2017 | Meeting 11

The eleventh Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 1 December 2017. Dr Sally Talbot (MLC South West Region) noted the increased level of cooperation and partnerships across all tiers of government during 2017. Land owner and community participation continued to grow during the year and this work will be consolidated in 2018.

## 1 Learnings from Queensland

A study trip to Queensland Office of the Great Barrier Reef by members of the Sustainable Agriculture Project Reference Group has provided insight into the effectiveness of regulation and Best Management Practice programs that the Queensland government have initiated to reduce nutrient, sediment and pesticide runoff from priority catchments and land uses into the Great Barrier Reef. An evaluation of alternative soil testing programs supporting the fertiliser management project will be carried out on 10 case study farms in the Geographe Catchment in 2018.

## 2 Learnings from New Zealand

Members of the DairyCare effluent project team visited the Waikato region in New Zealand in October 2017 to look at New Zealand's approach to dairy effluent management. The purpose of the trip was to gain insights into how to tackle the more difficult effluent management issues facing WA dairy farms by considering approaches taken by NZ farmers and dairy industry. Improvements to the technical specifications of dairy effluent systems are being incorporated into current plans with further initiatives to follow in 2018.

## 3 Collaboration model gains community support

For the past two years the Vasse Wonnerup Collaboration Group has met to share information and discuss future management of the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands. Results of a survey of the group showed that 99% of participants felt that the group had been "extremely valuable" to "valuable" in improving the communication and enabling input into the future management of the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands, and 93% of participants thought it was "extremely important" to "important" to continue the group.

Respondents selected the following reasons to continue the group into the future:

- Facilitating open communication between scientists, managers and community (78.5%);
- To provide a forum for updates on the science being undertaken on the wetlands (64.3%);

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- To input into the development of management plans for the Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands and lower Vasse River (93%); and,
- To foster the collaboration and relationships developed over the last 18 months (57%)

The Taskforce noted how valuable this approach has been in bringing people, ideas and opinions together and expressed its appreciation to all participants. It will look to use the same approach for other Revitalising Geographe Waterways projects.

#### **4 Future planning**

With 18 months remaining until the completion of Revitalising Geographe Waterways the Taskforce is turning its focus to what needs to happen after June 2019. A sustainability plan will be prepared which defines an overarching vision for Geographe waterways and identifies the scale and nature of the problem. The plan will outline key strategies to address the problem. These will be based on the key findings from current projects and actions from management plans. Importantly the plan will also identify who will lead new initiatives and options to fund new initiatives. Concurrent to this an investment plan will also be developed addressing the priority actions in the coming years and costings.

#### **5 Vasse science**

Key findings of the seawater inflow trials in the Vasse estuary 2015-2017 are supporting a new strategy this year to allow seawater exchange in the estuary from early December. It is anticipated that optimising exchange of seawater with the nutrient rich water in the estuary will reduce the concentration of algal blooms that traditionally occur at the end of December each year. The seawater exchange is hoped to improve water quality by increasing salinities in the exit channel of the estuary and reducing water temperature. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation will be carefully monitoring the water quality of the estuary to ensure that this action does not negatively impact on the ecology of the system.

#### **6 Sediment investigations**

The Taskforce endorsed key recommendations of the sediment investigation carried out by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation in the Vasse estuary exit channel. The sediment investigations involved determining the volume and composition of sediment in the channel and identified two main areas of organic sediment buildup: behind the Vasse Surge Barrier and at the corner of Estuary View Drive. The Water Corporation removed approximately half the sediment buildup at the Vasse Surge Gates in June 2017 on the basis of the investigation. Recommendations in the report include ongoing maintenance and removal of sediments at the gates and further investigations to remove sediment at Estuary View Driver including assessment of community support. A final report on the sediment investigation will be available in 2018.

#### **7 Toby Inlet bar opening**

On 11 December 2017 Toby Inlet will be opened to the ocean by the City of Busselton to increase water flushing and reduce the likelihood of algal blooms. The City's decision is based on a study by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to understand flushing to the Toby inlet. One of the most cost effective options recommended by the study is to maintain the Toby Inlet entrance open to the ocean to maximise water exchange and tidal flushing.

## **8 Lower Vasse River Treatment Trials continue**

December will see an expansion of the previous summer's water treatment trials in the Lower Vasse River. This summer will test the clay application at a larger scale in a more open stretch of river in front of the City of Busselton offices. Three trial areas of 15 by 30 metres each will be separated by floating PVC curtains across the river and anchored to the river bottom. Area 1 will be treated in December, Area 2 in January or February and Area 3 will be a control. As part of the trial we will also be assessing how the clay affects organisms living in the sediments.

## **9 Upcoming events for the community**

5 December	Wonnerup Bar opened
6 December	Vasse Seawater Trial begins and fish gates opened
7 December	Schools Fishing Day GeoCatch Fish tagging of Sea Mullet and Black Bream at the Vasse Surge Barrier
8 December	Training workshop GeoCatch Making Revegetation a Success – Revegetation of waterways and wetlands
11 December	Opening Toby Inlet Bar
March/April 2018	Annual report to community of activities

For specific dates and more information <https://geocatch.asn.au/events/>

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### More information

- Revitalising Geographie Waterways <https://rgw.dwer.wa.gov.au>
- Department of Water and Environmental Regulation [www.dwer.wa.gov.au](http://www.dwer.wa.gov.au)
- GeoCatch [www.geocatch.asn.au](http://www.geocatch.asn.au)